

VZCZCXRO3780
RR RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHAD #0755 1781229
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 261229Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1134
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 000755

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL, NEA/ARP, NEA/PI, NEA/PPD, R, ECA/PE/V

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: FEDERAL NATIONAL COUNCIL SEEKS MORE POWERS BUT MAY SKIP
(POSTPONE) NEXT ELECTIONS

REF: ABU DHABI 273

¶1. (SBU) The members and leaders of the UAE Federal National Council (FNC) are urging the UAEG to expand the FNC's power in two ways: 1) a stronger mechanism for ensuring the implementation of FNC recommendations, and 2) increased oversight authority over cabinet members. Both would enhance the "democratic" credentials of the institution, an advisory body composed of 20 appointed and 20 "elected" members who are increasingly seeking a voice and a link to the citizenry. In addition, the FNC is opening offices in all seven Emirates to increase interaction with its constituents. Elected FNC member Dr. Amal al Qobeisi confirmed to Pol Specialist that these offices are scheduled to open by the end of the year.

¶2. (SBU) While considering positive steps to enhance the FNC's role, the government is also contemplating skipping the next anticipated cycle of elections and simply lengthening the terms of current members (half selected in December 2006 and half appointed in early 2007) to four years. According to June 23 press quotes of FNC Speaker Abdul Aziz al-Ghurair, the plan to postpone elections is part of a political reform program initiated by President Khalifa bin Zayed and is designed to capitalize on the experience of the first two years of the term by giving the current team a longer period in office before shaking up the advisory "parliament." Many FNC members have confided in us that two years is not long enough to accomplish anything substantive, especially since 37 of the 40 current FNC members were newly chosen, less than two years ago (December 2006). However, a constitutional amendment (to change the FNC term from two years to four) would reportedly not be made before an extension is announced. The FNC has also hired consulting firm Booz Allen to help identify legislative best practices, and some members plan travel to Europe to learn from counterpart legislatures there.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: Reforms which expand the oversight powers of the FNC, strengthen its role vis-a-vis the executive, and increase its proximity to Emirati citizens are positive steps toward participatory governance. However, skipping an election without amending the constitution suggests a somewhat loose application of the principles of transparent governance.

¶4. (SBU) Comment continued: Post is expanding contacts with the UAE Federal National Council with an eye to opening International Visitor Leadership and Voluntary Visitor program opportunities for both elected and appointed FNC members. End comment.

QUINN